

Activity 6

Avoiding Comma Splices

The most common punctuation error in student writing is when two sentences are joined (spliced) together with only a comma between them. This error, called a comma splice (or run-on sentence), creates problems because readers can't tell where one sentence ends and the next begins.

In all of the following practices in this text, avoid writing comma splices. To help you learn how to eliminate them, do activities 6 and 7.

Example of a Comma Splice

His heart pounding, his lungs inhaling and exhaling like a bellows, Alfred, lunging toward his opponent Jacobs in the third round with his left, swung but missed, recovering from the miss, he turned swiftly, aimed again, and this time connected squarely with Jacobs' jaw.

Robert Lipsyte, The Contender

Best For:

Use one of these four ways to eliminate comma splices:

Sentences
that are so long
they become
confusing

1. Make two sentences:

His heart pounding, his lungs inhaling and exhaling like a bellows, Alfred, lunging toward his opponent Jacobs in the third round with his left, swung but missed. *Recovering* from the miss, he turned swiftly, aimed again, and this time connected squarely with Jacobs' jaw.

When the
transition of
the FANBOYS
word intensifies
clarity or
meaning

2. Keep the comma but add *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*, *yet*, or *for* (coordinating conjunctions) to join the sentences:

His heart pounding, his lungs inhaling and exhaling like a bellows, Alfred, lunging toward his opponent Jacobs in the third round with his left, swung but missed, *but* recovering from the miss, he turned swiftly, aimed again, and this time connected squarely with Jacobs' jaw.

When a
pronoun is
using in the

3. Change the comma to a semicolon:

His heart pounding, his lungs inhaling and exhaling like a bellows, Alfred, lunging toward his opponent Jacobs in the

2nd sentence to describe the subject of the original sentence, and using the subject's actual name would seem repetitive.

/OR for use
in a
juxtaposition

Best For:
When the
transitional
word intensifies
clarity or
meaning

third round with his left, swung but missed ☹ recovering from the miss, he turned swiftly, aimed again, and this time connected squarely with Jacobs' jaw.

4. Change the comma to a semicolon, and add *nevertheless*, *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*, *in fact*, *for example*, *consequently*, or *as a result* (conjunctive adverbs), and put a comma after the conjunctive adverb:
His heart pounding, his lungs inhaling and exhaling like a bellows, Alfred, lunging toward his opponent Jacobs in the third round with his left, swung but missed ☹ *however*, recovering from the miss, he turned swiftly, aimed again, and this time connected squarely with Jacobs' jaw.

Practice 1

Locate and eliminate the comma splice by making that comma a period and capitalizing the next word to create two separate sentences.

- 1a. When Mark Twain,
 - b. the famous author
 - c. whose real name was Samuel Clemens,
 - d. was a boy of fourteen,
 - e. he thought his father was stupid,
 - f. when Twain reached 21,
 - g. he was amazed how much his father had learned.
- 2a. Extremely arrogant and conceited
 - b. Jackson didn't understand how his overpowering style affected his lack of friends,
 - c. his manager,
 - d. after watching his ego swell after the game,
 - e. told him to think more of others, and less of himself.
- 3a. Oatmeal,

- b. that common breakfast cereal,
 - c. is not just for breakfast anymore,
 - d. mushy and semidistasteful,
 - e. it's good for other things,
 - f. like putting in your little brother's shoes,
 - g. his baseball glove,
 - h. or his ears.
- 4a. As the storm,
- b. a blizzard that lasted two days,
 - c. covered the landscape,
 - d. blanketing everything in white,
 - e. Jake Slatterly,
 - f. whose job was to make sure provisions were ample,
 - g. began to worry,
 - h. he made a plan,
 - i. one that was by no means certain of success,
 - j. to hitch one of the horses to a wagon,
 - k. drive the little-used road on the other side of the mountain,
 - l. and with luck and a lot of prayers,
 - m. get to town to buy some grub and coffee.

Practice 2

Locate and eliminate the comma that is the comma splice, using a variety of ways to eliminate the comma splice. (Review pp.

18-19.) *Use at least one of each way.*

1. In large metropolitan areas, the yellow pages are a useful means of locating businesses, services, and products, the average customer would be lost without this aid.

2. Very overweight and stocky, Mr. Jackson didn't understand fully how his weight problem affected his health, his doctor, after giving him a physical, put him on a strict diet of fruits, vegetables, and lean meat.
3. I am not ashamed to admit it, I do enjoy reading a good book, one which is entertaining, one which stimulates my thinking, and one which captures my imagination.
4. Sliding over the ice-covered road, the car lost traction briefly, spun toward the edge of the highway, but finally righted itself, the car in the other lane, fortunately, moved out of the way.
5. Wandering aimlessly for days, Indiana Jones couldn't escape the dreaded banana bearers, his companion, after surveying the situation, suggested they put bags over their heads, run around in circles, and climb trees quickly.

Activity 7

Identifying and Removing Comma Splices

Practice 1

Below is a description of a football player nicknamed Darling making a long run for a touchdown from Irwin Shaw's "The Eighty-Yard Run." In each list, one of the commas is a comma splice that was not in the original. Remove each comma splice using one of the four ways to eliminate comma splices.

In doing this practice, you will see that comma splices create problems for readers, and must be eliminated.

- 1a. The pass was high and wide,
 - b. and Darling jumped for it,
 - c. feeling it slap flatly against his hands as he shook his hips to throw off the halfback who was diving at him,
 - d. the center floated by,
 - e. his hands desperately brushing Darling's knee as Darling picked his feet up high and delicately ran over a blocker and an opposing linesman in a jumble on the ground near the scrimmage line.
- 2a. He smiled a little to himself as he ran,
 - b. holding the ball lightly in front of him,
 - c. his knees pumping high,
 - d. his hips twisting in the almost girlish run of a back in a broken field,
 - e. the first halfback came at him,
 - f. and Darling fed him his leg,
 - g. then swung at the last moment,
 - h. took the shock of the man's shoulder without breaking stride,

- i. ran right through him,
- j. his cleats biting securely into the turf.

3a. There was only the safety man now,

- b. coming warily at him,
- c. his arms crooked,
- d. hands spread,
- e. he tucked the ball in,
- f. spurted at him,
- g. driving hard,
- h. hurling himself along,
- i. his legs pounding,
- j. knees high,
- k. all two hundred pounds bunched into controlled attack.

4a. Without thought,

- b. his arms and legs working beautifully together,
- c. Darling headed right for the safety man,
- d. stiff-armed him,
- e. feeling blood spurt instantaneously from the man's nose onto his hand,
- f. seeing his face go awry,
- g. head turned,
- h. mouth pulled to one side,
- i. Darling pivoted away,
- j. keeping the arm locked,
- k. dropping the safety man as he ran easily toward the goal line,
- l. with the drumming of cleats diminishing behind him.

Practice 2

Five of the twenty-one commas below are comma splices that were not in the original paragraphs. Tell the numbers of the comma splices, copy the paragraphs, and then eliminate comma splices using whatever way seems effective. (To review the four ways to eliminate comma splices, see Activity 6.)

The May sunset was red in clouds (1), and there was still half an hour to twilight (2), the dry slope was dotted with rabbits (3), some nibbling at the thin grass near their holes (4), others pushing further down to look for dandelions or perhaps a cowslip that the rest had missed. Here and there one sat upright on an ant heap and looked about (5), with ears erect and nose in the wind (6), a blackbird (7), singing undisturbed on the outskirts of the wood (8), showed that there was nothing alarming there (9), and in the other direction (10), along the brook (11), all was plain to be seen (12), empty and quiet (13), the warren was at peace.

At the top of the bank (14), close to the wild cherry where the blackbird sang (15), was a little group of holes almost hidden by brambles (16), in the green half-light (17), at the mouth of one of these holes (18), two rabbits were sitting together side by side. At length (19), the larger of the two came out (20), slipped along the bank under cover of the brambles and so down into the ditch and up into the field (21), a few moments later the other followed.

Richard Adams, Watership Down